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UA37/44 Diary to Kelly

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Fifty years ago today I was awakened in the night by the sound of whistles: World War I had ended. I felt a strange exultation; now, I fully believed, we had ended the war that was fought to end all wars. I grabbed my pen and set down some of my exultation in my diary. I am almost afraid or ashamed to read that entry now, and I would not do so except to see how foolish and short-sighted I was and how well I reflected the foolishness and short-sightedness of my whole generation. Not too many years after 1918 the veterans put on a program at chapel. Among other things they sang was Irving Berlin's "Over There," with its closing lines: "And we won't come back till it's over, over there." Superintendent T. C. Cherry, who happened to be at chapel that morning, was asked to say a few words on the occasion. Among others he said that we came back much too soon. Some of the faculty and many of the students branded him as a wet-blanket thrower. Too soon we all realized that the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm was a mere adolescent as compared with the Germany of Adolf Hitler. We certainly came back too soon.

Even while World War ^I was going on, I got disgusted with the Hollywoodish way in which so many people took it. Many of us had been raised on Civil War stories and somehow felt that war was a risky but highly-interesting game. The soldiers went away feeling like Crusaders, out to lick the world, if necessary. Months later, when the troops came home, they and we realized the lack of glamor in the actual war: cooties, trenches, gas, and the rest of the disillusioning events had shown that Sherman had not exaggerated when he defined war; he had hardly told enough truth, for our Civil War was almost a picnic as compared with the modern types of wars. Fortunately, we did not put on so much circus stuff when World War II came along; we had learned a costly and necessary lesson.